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The Fate of Lake Communities to be decided by SFWMD

Clewiston, FL December 2, 2008 - Today the South Florida Water Management Governing Board is conducting a workshop, where they will discuss the acquisition of 180,000+ acres from U. S. Sugar Corp. Since June 24, 2008, when the secret negotiations were first made public, the communities surrounding Lake Okeechobee have quietly expressed their concerns regarding the impacts of the State of Florida's actions on our communities. Although we respect the right of U. S. Sugar Corp.'s management to act in their best interest, and applaud Governor Crist's attempt to restore the Everglades ecosystem and to secure land for water storage, these goals can be accomplished without the demise of the five communities of the Southern Lake Okeechobee region, with their approximately 40,000 residents, and the negative economic impact from the loss of \$1.5B annually statewide (including 10,000 jobs), not to mention the initial land cost of \$1.34B. See study and revised study titled, *University of Florida Economic Impacts of the U.S. Sugar Corporation Buyout in Florida* and *Economic Impacts of the U.S. Sugar Corporation in Florida: Implications of the Purchase by the State of Florida*.

Although the latest land-only deal has been spun as a win-win situation and described by both Governor Crist and U. S. Sugar, as one that safeguards U.S. Sugar's 1,700 direct jobs and 8,500 indirect jobs, we, who will suffer the unintended consequences of this deal, have seen nothing from U.S. Sugar Corp., Governor Crist, the Office of Trade, Tourism and Economic Development, the South Florida Water Management District or any other State or Federal official or agency that lays out how this is to be accomplished or how the negative consequences of this purchase are going to be addressed. The fact that the mill, juice plant and railroad are not a part of this deal is not driven by the goal of job preservation, although that is how it is being portrayed. Quite the contrary. The moment the sugar mill was separated from the only land that could assure its viability, the fate of its U. S. Sugar Corp.'s 1,700 jobs was sealed.

As we plead our case to the different organizations that are collaborating, to in effect, devastate our communities, specifically the South Florida Water Management District, we hear that it is not their mission or mandate to concern itself with the social costs of this purchase. Although that may be true, at a minimum they hold a moral obligation to assure their actions do not bring about the demise of our communities and our 40,000 residents. Although as a small community we are accustomed to being taken for granted and have been told that we do not have enough votes to matter, and that we do not have a say, we can only hope that the Governor and the South Florida Water Management District recognize their moral obligations in this transaction. Further, we ask that given those moral obligations, they should delay any action in this matter until those consequences have been fully addressed.